

THE BIBLICAL BASIS
of
THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

A paper presented to the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
EVANGELICALS, Los Angeles, California, April 9, 1975.

by

Dr. C. M. Ward
President
BETHANY BIBLE COLLEGE
Santa Cruz, California

BIBLICAL BASIS OF THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The title Biblical Basis of the Church and Higher Education, reminds me of George Buttrick's statement concerning Biblical Thought. It implies he said, "simply the thinking and the faith set forth in the Bible." (Buttrick, 1960, p. 3) This thinking and this faith are simply the mind, the will, and the desire of God to consummate in man the potential expressed in God's statement, "Let us make man in our own image." (Genesis 1:26) "Biblical thinking," Buttrick continued, "cuts across other schools of thought" while "Biblical faith believes that history is so real that God himself is revealed within it in a once-for-all encounter with human life."

The basis of God's concern to educate is seen in His relation to Noah (Genesis 7:1) when God said "for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." Implicit in this overwhelming expression of grace and love, was the desire to "expand" Noah's and his offspring's knowledge of the Lord God Almighty! So a covenant was made, God's covenant, to remember, to bless, to reveal His face in glory and power--and Noah's responsibility was to build an altar, to worship and to pass this relationship and understanding along to others, adults who stood as he did, awed before the magnitude and magnificence of God.

It were as if God had said aloud, "Man cannot attain unto the glory for which I created him unless he learns as

you have Noah, to acknowledge Me, to worship Me, to yield to My complete and perfect Will!"

Without a textbook, without a lectern, his classroom the whole world and his pupils those who had plumbed the depths of the deluge, albeit in the safety of the Ark, and lived to see the sunshine of God's smile and the beauty of the rainbow, perpetual reminder of God's promise of mercy and grace, that Noah, great teacher he was, lived out, that is, he demonstrated in living color, the consecration of sacrifice. He did what the Master teacher did, and what every great educator must do--he led his pupils into the reality of personal, meaningful, lifechanging experience. He brought them to the center of reality, to the one place where there is sanity, and peace, and hope, he led them to God!

If man could simply look at history and be reminded of God's dealings with mankind, he could come close to Martin Heidegger's phrase that "man 'being open to himself,' always transcends in his earthly existence," but as Buttrick proclaims, "he cannot of himself lift himself above the limitations of history." (Buttrick, op. cit., p. 13) The truth remains, that only as the student knows the Biblical faith, that is, only as he comes face to face with the cause of Biblical faith, God Himself, will he continue to nourish the wealth of scientific learning which has come out of our western world.

PURPOSE

God's purpose, as seen from the beginning of Scripture, has been to bring man's whole nature and being (body, soul, and spirit, or would you prefer intellect, emotions, and will?) into harmony with His nature and His creation, which was made specifically for man. (Psalms 8:6) Man was given dominion over all earthly creation. "Use it," God said. But sin drew a dark curtain of guilt and shame between God and this crown of His creation. The Psalmist said, "For thou hast made him a little lower than the 'gods,' and hast crowned him with glory and honor!" (Psalms 8:5) Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul cried out, "O man you have no excuse!" for "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. . . ." (Romans 1:20-23)

The heartbeat of the Christian educator is in perfect accord with that of the Missionary Evangelist who answers Paul's challenge, "How than shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14) The position and the importance of the ministry of the Christian educator can

scarcely be overrated, when by the aid of the Holy Spirit, he helps the student find the center of meaning, Jesus Christ, Who is the Truth! The excitement which follows is "indescribably delicious" for it leads to the discovery of meaningful vertical and horizontal relationships between God and His creation. Remember how God shared with one of his humble teachers the wonderful secrets of the lowly peanut?

Is it any wonder that Father Fitzpatrick was moved to write, "If the teacher is a co-adjutor of God in the training and development of souls, then all other human work pales into insignificance." (Fitzpatrick, 1950, p. 125)

PLAN

"The whole man, we must educate the whole man" is a cry long heard from Christian educators. But often the emerging patterns of that education resemble a collage, a collection of abstract, flat objects presenting an essentially meaningless message.

We are not adding unto man the dimension of religion, including worship, in order to make him whole! No, we are bringing the individual into His Royal Presence, bringing together the Revelator and man--so man can find his inner sense of worth, his destiny, his daily task of "being fruitful and replenishing the earth." Out of this realization comes the spontaneous burst of adoration and service which we call worship! And this, and this alone, God accepts!

James Bramblet, quoting from Dr. Mark Fakkema put it most succinctly, "True Christian education is unveiling the All Glorious God of creation." (Bramblet, 1974, p. 3) With the Psalmist who penned, "The heavens declare the glory of God" and "the whole earth is full of His glory," (Psalms 19:1; 72:19) we as discerning creatures should see God's glory on exhibition everywhere, and as educators and responsible images of God, we should unveil this glory in our lives. Because of man's unbelief and disobedience, God is now alien to the process of much higher education. Bramblet went on to say that "it is to this task of restoring God to education that the Christian school has set itself." We might applaud the desire to achieve such a goal--except we realize that God hasn't gone off anywhere--it is man who has wandered away. So let us rephrase this to say, it is to the task of restoring knowledge and learning to its rightful place of submission and dependence on God that we have set our hand.

The skills learned, or the startling technical discoveries made in the university laboratory never can come to full bloom until they are seen within the framework of God's purpose and plan.

Christian education must see in perspective, it must help the learner to open himself fully to God's purpose and revelation so that the cognitive and affective aspects will fit into place. Gaebelein put it this way, "Subjects are not taught in a vacuum, teaching that would lay any claim

at all to distinction, if not actual greatness, is the influence of personality upon personality, rather than the mere imparting of a set of facts." (Gaebelein, 1951, p. 48)

Have we lost sight of the fact we are educating people, and of the importance both of these people and our mission to them? This is reflected in Ferré's statement that "what we see depends more than we think on what we are." (Ferré, 1954, p. 19) And again he said, "Our main problem is not quantity of knowledge, but selectivity--quality of thought."

This leads us to the understanding of a basic Biblical principle concerning God's plan for educating. He chooses people to know Him and to become the channels for the flow of reality. The true asset of the college or university is not in its huge collection of audio-visual media which represents the distillation of man's cognitive and affective knowledge, nor of the elaborate laboratories in which the secrets of science are ferreted out, but in its possession of men who know God and who humbly acknowledge all learning and discovery to be within the realm of God's grace and love to all mankind. How God yearns to open to man the mysteries of this physical universe, but is man in a position before God to use this knowledge responsibly? The discovery of the secret of the atom, which holds our generation in such awe is infinitesimal compared to what God would like to reveal to man.

Just as in the realm of salvation, the believer must

acknowledge God and he must be open and submissive to the correction and leading of the Holy Spirit, before he can come, as Paul said, "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)

There really is no basic difference between the minister and the Christian educator. The minister, be he pastor or evangelist, is commissioned for a specific task of sounding the clarion call that Jesus Saves and to help men find their life in Him! But the Christian educator has a much broader field. As one of the Lord's redeemed, he feels the urging of the Holy Spirit to share his joy and fulness in Christ, and in this sense evangelizes. But his work is greater for he recognizes fully now for the first time his responsibility to fulfill God's intention that this whole creation was created for man's purpose in glorifying God. Not at all in the deistic sense, but in full and free partnership with God. Salvation includes much more than the forgiveness of sin, it includes also the daily unfolding of God's revelation of Himself and the universe to man as man works in harmony in the Body of Christ, to give praise, honor and glory to God! Biblical education is not a simple response of man to God in the moment, in isolation as the existentialists would have it, but a free, joyful, exciting response using the whole stage which God has prepared; which is the universe. Man must be educated to "know." Without knowledge he is as a musician trying to play a symphony with only one note.

So all knowledge, as all notes played by all the musicians must be controlled by the conductor, who in reality is our lovely Lord!

PROBLEM

We might ask ourselves what is a college education today? Or better still, what is a Christian college education today? To say that traditionally, higher education has been viewed as a "liberal education" is to state the obvious. This term "liberal" has been variously defined, but consensus indicates it has always been interpreted to mean a broad understanding of the different aspects of life. Not until recent years has there been any indication of a need for or pressure to change the baccalaureate program into job training.

Ralph Barton Perry said, "Education is liberal in so far as it invites and qualifies men to choose deeply and fundamentally, to choose ends as well as means, to choose remote as well as immediate ends, to choose from many rather than from few possibilities." (Freedman, 1963, p. 46) Gordon N. Ray, Secretary General of the Guggenheim Foundation, made a further distinction when he said, "Specialized training deals with what is 'right,' liberal education with what is 'true.'" (Freedman, op. cit., p. 48)

The problem is not liberal education per se, but a most subtle turn of educational definition which makes God's basis for education even more imperative!

A. E. Houseman crystalized this problem eloquently.

"Knowledge resembles virtue," he said, ". . .it is not merely a means of procuring good, but is good in itself." Further he argued, "once we have recognized that knowledge in itself is good for man, we shall need to invent no pretext for studying this subject or that. . .other desires perish in their gratification, but the desire of knowledge never." (Freedman, op. cit., p. 46)

How easy for the educators in institutions of higher learning to accept this "Part Truth" and build upon it a distorted view of man and the universe. Only Christian education can bring the needed corrective. Knowledge is valuable, it is akin to virtue, but only as knowledge is received and used within the context of God's complete revelation and according to His plan, can knowledge find its full usefulness. Knowledge is like the many colored threads that only the master weaver can put into proper position to form a beautiful tapestry.

Wicke made a survey of Church-related colleges in which he discovered a consensus of two fundamental purposes expressed for their existence. 1. To cultivate the mind, by which they meant to develop intellectual powers and virtues which colleges accept as their first responsibility, and, 2. Cultivation of spirit, by which they meant development of self-control, self-judging powers. He summarized by saying that the goal of Christian education requires "that the student again and again be vitally confronted with the

foundation questions of human life." (Wicke, 1964, p. 95)

"Recent educational literature makes it appear almost a modern discovery, a distinguished characteristic of modern education that life is a great teacher, and that education is a kind of living." (Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 58) But the Bible said it centuries ago, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

As has been said, "Love is the key to all true relationship between persons; in fact, persons can grow as persons only if they love and are loved. For that reason love is at the very heart of education." (Jeffrys, 1950, p. 163)

Let me close with Father Fitzpatrick's summary of Paul's love as shown in his statement above, "Be ye followers of me. . . ." "There is the educational ideal which has been transforming the world for twenty centuries. It is still an active force among men. Christ is the Ideal. In these unkingly days He is King. Believe in Him thoroughly and you will change the face of the world--and you shall have everlasting life." (Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 59)

REFERENCES

James M. Bramblet, The Christian School Curriculum (An unpublished mimeograph paper, 1974).

George A. Buttrick, Biblical Thought And The Secular University (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960).

Nels F. S. Ferré, Christian Faith And Higher Education (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954).

Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Exploring A Theology Of Education (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1950).

Morris Freedman, Chaos In Our Colleges (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1963).

Frank E. Gaebelein, Christian Education In A Democracy (New York: Oxford, 1951).

Holy Bible (Quotations from Authorized Version).

M. V. C. Jeffrys, Glacon: An Inquiry Into The Aims Of Education (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1950).

Myron F. Wicke, The Church-Related College (Washington D. C.: The Center For Applied Research In Education, Inc., 1964).